

Wishing On Dragon Scales

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Summary: "'It's a tradition the little kids started a few years ago. If a Terrible Terror leaves a scale on your clothes, you can make a wish.' 'Oh really?...And what would you wish for'" Valka and Hiccup take a break from the hardships of Reconstruction to ponder grief, belonging, and lost sleep. Post-HtTYD2. Stalka and Hiccstrid discussed.

Wishing On Dragon Scales

Valka and Cloudjumper soared over Berk's treetops, delighted to be breathing in the wind after another day on the ground. Flying, once an activity as instinctive as walking, was now a luxury in the recovering village. Remembering that she was short on healing herbs, Valka scanned the forest below for a place to land, and she spotted the cove that she remembered from years before. She smiled, seeing that it was brimming with Terrible Terrors, and she and Cloudjumper dove to join them.

As soon as they swooped to the cove floor, the miniature dragons clustered in a cloud around the pair. Laughter bubbled from Valka's belly as the Terrors gripped her limbs, scuttled across her torso, and tugged her hair with their claws. She stepped down from Cloudjumper's back, taking care to not tread on any tails, and her dragon shook his head to shoo the nuisances.

Sunlight slanted onto lazy Terrors piled in napping heaps, but the cove grew cooler and shadier as the sun set. While Cloudjumper settled onto a still-warm boulder, Terrors disturbed the pond, distorting the reflection. It had been emptied of fish years ago, but the Terrors enjoyed a good swim nonetheless, emerging only to snatch a mouthful of midges before diving under again.

Scattering the Terrors with a wave of her staff, Valka knelt by a cluster of Herb Robert that grew near the water. Leaning her staff against a boulder, she took a small leather pouch from her belt and

gathered leaves from the flowering plant, wrinkling her nose at the odor. Below the chorus of singing Terrors, she hummed as she tried to push the hardships of the past weeks from her mind.

Reconstruction had begun as soon as Hiccup was named chief. While other villagers rebuilt houses and addressed the few human casualties, Valka focused all her efforts on attending mangled dragons, such as one-headed Zipplebacks and Deadly Nadders with severed tails. Possible infection and immobility threatened those who survived their injuries, and those who had spend years under Drago's control suffered psychological wounds that only time could heal. In spite of her best efforts, it was more merciful, in some cases, to put the poor things out of their misery.

Word had quickly spread that Valka knew more about dragons than even Hiccup, and soon, she no longer had to seek out her patients. However, some villagers, having heard that Valka abandoned her husband and son, refused her care, even when she pleaded to ease their dragons' suffering.

Yes, the last couple of weeks had been trying for Valka, but everyone else had struggled too, adjusting to new leadership and working from dawn until dusk. Their only respite during the day was nã;ttmã;l, when the villagers gathered around their kettles for food, drink, and company. Even Hiccup, who went with Toothless to chase down fish for the dragons every afternoon, stayed in the village when he could. Only Valka chose to remain alone.

Every day, as the sun skimmed the horizon, throwing shadows and golden light over the island, she reacquainted herself with Berk's wooded valleys and ragged hills. She felt more at home with Cloudjumper and the other dragons than at the Haddock house, where the bed smothered her with its soft texture and Stoick's fading scent. The dragons' chatter was as genuine and spontaneous as a babbling stream, but the village bustle sounded artificial and metallic.

Cloudjumper purred as a shadow flickered at the edge of Valka's vision. Craning her head toward the sky, she saw Hiccup and Toothless circling overhead, preparing to land. She smiled and stood, stowing away her pouch of herbs and brushing dirt off her knees.

The Terrors rose like a whirlwind as Toothless swept into the cove, and Hiccup hid his face in his arms as he stepped down from the Night Fury. The horde might have stolen him away had Toothless not reared onto his hind legs and unleashed a roar that sent them scattering. With the Terrors' incessant chattering gone, one could hear the gentle hum of insects and see fireflies flickering over the now-smooth pond surface.

Valka opened her arms as her son approached, and they pulled each other into an embrace. The tang of herbs and earth clung to her hair, and Hiccup reeked of fish and sea water, making for an especially pungent reunion.

"Now," she began, moving her hands to Hiccup's shoulders as she looked him over. "What brings you to see the crazy dragon lady during nã;ttmã;l? Nothing wrong with Toothless, I hope." She turned and laughed when she saw Toothless nipping at Cloudjumper's head. Her Stormcutter eyed him warily, then grunted and rolled onto his back,

offering himself as a reluctant playmate.

Acknowledging the dragons with only a twitch of the lips, Hiccup reassured Valka.

"No, we've just been flying around the island since feeding timeâ€|"

"An awfully long time to be away from your village."

"â€|and we were on our way back when we saw you down here. It seems like we never see you, so we thought we'd say 'hello.'"

Valka gently plucked at her son's still-damp hair and frowned at the dark circles under his eyes.

"You look so pale, Hiccup."

He shrugged and waved off her concern as he sat by the water. Keeping an eye on him, Valka knelt near her son and resumed her herb gathering.

Every morning, before Hiccup left the house, she saw him leaning against the doorframe, rubbing his eyes and sighing. He would then straighten his back and square his shoulders, ready to maintain a façade of strength, only to reverse the routine when he came home after sunset. So far, only Toothless, Astrid, and Valka knew how exhausted he really was. Despite his efforts to appear alert, however, his drooping eyelids and muted speech were starting to betray his fatigue to the other clan members.

"Look at that, we both have Terror scales on our sleeves."

His sudden remark startled her from her musings. She glanced at the sleeves in question, then back to her son, who explained, "It's a tradition the little kids started a few years ago. If a Terrible Terror leaves a scale on your clothes, you can make a wish."

"Oh really?" Valka tilted her head. "And what would you wish for?"

With a sigh, Hiccup flopped onto his back, crushing a patch of herbs and releasing their scent into the air.

"A full night of sleep."

Valka shook her head. "I'm afraid that wish is wasted on a young chief."

Hiccup groaned and flung an arm over his eyes. "I knew being chief wasn't an easy job, but this is crazy. There's Reconstruction, celebrations for the end of Reconstruction, making room for all the new dragons, building the statue, and, on top of all that, people who don't like how I run the village."

"Maybe you should let Astrid be chief for a day while you take a nap," Valka joked.

He tossed his arm away from his face and squinted at the dimming sky. "I suppose. She's certainly been eager to help."

Valka's brow wrinkled, not entirely sure what he meant by that. Astrid had been no busier than anyone else, though she did spare time to visit him most evenings. However, as of late, her visits had been shorter and less frequent.

Hiccup slowly sat up, burying his fingers into his tangled hair as he explained, "We used to spend a lot of time together, but lately, I've been feelingâ€¦distant."

His fingers snaked across his scalp to clutch fistfuls of hair at a time. Valka saw his lopsided, greasy mass of hair and wondered if this was a new habit brought on by stress.

"I was going to marry her before all this happened." His hand briefly lifted from his head to gesture to the surrounding air. Musing his hair one more time, he began picking apart blades of grass in his fingers. "I love her. I know she wants to be there for me, I justâ€¦" His face worked for a moment before he gave up trying to explain himself. He hurled the grass into the pond, where it floated among the bubbles and ripples its landing created.

As her hands emerged from the herbs to settle on her thighs, Valka's expression sobered. Though he hadn't mentioned Stoick among the reasons why he was losing sleep, she was sure that grief disturbed his dreams. Almost every night, the sound of pacing and muffled whispers echoed from his upstairs bedroom, disrupting her already light sleep. The morning after the sjaund, when Hiccup officially accepted his inheritance, both of them had stumbled about in an exhausted stupor.

Although the topic of Stoick was still sensitiveâ€¦speaking his name felt like summoning a ghostâ€¦Valka wondered if she could ease her son's anxiety with a story. She began: "When my mother died, years before you were born, I was heartbroken. Your father tried so hard to comfort me, but I was having none of it."

Hiccup's forehead clenchedâ€¦"like she thought it mightâ€¦"as she continued.

"He picked me wildflowers, brought me tea and buttered bread, and gave me enough seashells to decorate all of Berk." She bit her lip, remembering how they had littered every surface of her home. "I knew he meant well, but I didn't want seashells, or flowers, or any of those things. I wanted my mother alive."

"I told him as much one night, when he came to drop off more gifts. I raged and cried and tried to give everything back, but he just stood there, looking more pained than I'd ever seen him. When I finally stopped shouting, I believed he would walk out the door and leave me on my own. Instead, he took me in his arms, and for the first time, he told me that he loved me."

Her son had a curious, hungry gleam in his eyes. Briefly breaking the spell, she picked a tiny, pink Herb Robert flower and tucked it behind Hiccup's ear, almost laughing aloud when he squirmed and brushed it away with a smirk.

"In the next months," she resumed, relieved to see her son smile, "I was ill-tempered and unreasonable, yet he was patient. He fetched me

anything I needed, helped with the housework, and never criticized my feelings." Overcome with affection for her son, she laid a hand against his cheek. "I grieved deeply and for a long time, but I didn't reject him after that night. Instead, I thanked Freyja every day that someone so wonderful could love me so much."

Hiccup's brow knotted tighter, then melted smooth as he leaned into her right palm. Though his stubble tickled her fingers, she was reminded of a long ago time when his cheeks were rosy and soft. That frail child shouldn't have survived, yet here he was, brave and strong and alive. Since the day they found each other in the Sanctuary, she wondered what she had done to deserve both Stoick's and Hiccup's forgiveness.

"So?" Her son reached over and plucked the Terror scale from her sleeve, drawing Valka out of her reverie. "What would you wish for?"

"Oh, nothing." She retracted her hand and grasped the folds of her skirt. "It's silly."

Hiccup snickered as he flicked the scale to the side. "You'd want to be turned into a dragon, wouldn't you?"

"No, nothing like that," Valka snorted. She paused, unsure if she should tell her son, the reason for her return, that she was unsatisfied with Berk.

"I want to walk through the village without feeling like a stranger, Hiccup," she admitted, searching her son's expression. "It feels like I'm a ghost, or like I'm dreaming." She chuckled, unnerved by her own seriousness. "All the babies have grown big like you!" she reached out to pinch Hiccup's cheeks, giggling harder when he ducked out of reach, "all the grown-ups are creaky geezers like me, and all the creaky geezers have died! Well, all except Gothi."

"Yeah, if anyone survives Ragnarok, it'll be Gothi," Hiccup agreed with a small grin. "But you have more friends than you think. I know we have our hands full right now, but you have Toothless and me." Pausing his and Cloudjumper's game of chase-the-butterfly, Toothless snapped his head around at the mention of his name. Hiccup rose and walked to the Night Fury, who crouched and beamed at his human with bright eyes and a lolling tongue.

"You have Astrid and her family, too. Her dad's a little scary, but I'm sure he'll be nice to you." Hiccup sidestepped Toothless' playful nips as he thought. "Let's see! There's Gobber, of course. He's an old friend. Oh, and Fishlegs has been dying to meet you. If he gets anywhere near you, he'll talk about dragons 'till the yaks come home."

Valka smiled as she stood, retrieving her staff and approaching Toothless. He crooned when she reached out to stroke his scales, and Cloudjumper watched them from a respectful distance.

"And there's Snotlout and the twins," Hiccup added as an afterthought. "They're knuckleheads, but they mean well."

He let out a huge yawn, and Valka was reminded of her son's fatigue. As demanding as these past weeks had been, it was no wonder that her

son dreaded company. He was already defying expectations by walking upright and forming coherent sentences.

Valka laid a hand on his shoulder. "These people are here for you too, Hiccup. I'd hate to see you repeat my mistakes by pushing them away."

A half-smile flickered across Hiccup's face, and a silent moment passed, each grateful for the other's company. Just then, a gust of wind blew overhead, stirring the treetops. Valka's eyes followed the trembling branches to the purple sky above them, then returned her son. "Have you eaten at all today?"

He looked guilty, mumbling, "I had a bite of that bread you made last weekâ€¦"

Valka crossed her arms, and Hiccup got the message to return to nÃ;ttmÃ;lâ€"or whatever was left of it. He mounted Toothless, then scoured his pockets, producing two slips of paper and handing them to Valka.

"Before I forget, Oda the Brewer has offered you free mead whenever you want it, and the Alfrsons have asked you to join their nÃ;ttmÃ;l sometime."

Valka took the invitations, trying to recall why these people would single her out.

"Yes, I healed their dragons," she mumbled, remembering how these battle-hardened villagers had softened when their dragons had recovered. "Oda's Gronckle nearly lost an eye, and the Alfrsons' Monstrous Nightmare had a nasty infection. His fever finally broke two days ago."

"See? You're famous already," Hiccup commented as he clipped himself to Toothless' saddle. In a more subdued tone, he added, "Once Reconstruction settles down, you might be getting a lot more attention. It'll be strange at first, but you'll get used to it."

Valka shook her head. She hadn't been familiar with Oda nor the Alfrsons before she left twenty years ago, yet here they were, expressing gratitude for helping their dragons. For all its shortcomings, this new Berk still surprised her every day.

"Thank you, son." She grasped his hand.

He nodded once and replied, "No, thank you," before patting Toothless' neck. With a snort, the Night Fury spread his wings and shot into the sky, leaving nothing but a whoosh of air.

As soon as Toothless was gone, the Terrible Terrors slunk back into the cove, resuming their cacophonous song. Cloudjumper gurgled when Valka reached for him, and, stroking his head, she whispered, "Maybe Berk can be home again, Cloudjumper." Maybe she could share her knowledge of dragons, and the people she once knew could forgive her for leaving.

A green male Terror crawled onto her foot and scampered up her leg, stopping to perch on her shoulder. Purring, he gnawed on loose

strands of hair, and Valka smiled at the dragon's affection.

"Maybe I can be the mother Hiccup deserves," she declared, running a finger along the Terror's neck as he licked her cheek. "Stranger things have happened, haven't they, little one?"

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><p>AN: **Thank you so much for reading **Wishing On Dragon Scales**! Would you believe this story started life as a Hiccstrid fic? No, really. Valka was going to have a secondary role, but the more I thought about it, the more I felt that she should provide the POV. Hiccstrid was still a major focus until my lovely beta reader **nicoli-boli **called me out on some questionable characterization. Beta readers. What would we do without them.

I might write a lot more Valka-centric fics in the future. Fair warning.

* * *

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